



The Kitchen as Crucible: Reinvention in *The Roommate*

Description

SALT LAKE CITY, UT In Salt Lake Acting Company's Utah premiere of Jen Silverman's *The Roommate*, directed by **Teresa Sanderson**, the kitchen becomes a battleground for rebirth. Two women—one restless, one resigned—collide in a darkly comic dance of risk, reinvention, and regret. *The Roommate* has already drawn national attention, included in **The New York Times** fall theatre preview, *Purple Rain* and *41 More Plays and Musicals to See in the U.S. This Fall* (Sept. 2024).

Production Lineage

Since premiering at the 2015 Humana Festival at Actors Theatre of Louisville—directed by Mike Donahue—*The Roommate* has traveled widely, finding new life with each staging. The 2017 San Francisco Playhouse production, directed by Becca Wolff, emphasized the play's wry humor and domestic intimacy. That same year, Maggie Burrows's direction at the Williamstown Theatre Festival revealed a sharper psychological edge, while Phylicia Rashad's 2018 Steppenwolf Theatre Company production in Chicago foregrounded themes of reinvention and invisibility, with Sandra Marquez and Ora Jones in the lead roles.

In 2019, Donahue returned to helm the Long Wharf Theatre production, reuniting with original cast member Tasha Lawrence. Most recently, the 2024 Broadway premiere at the Booth Theatre—directed by Jack O'Brien and starring Mia Farrow and Patti LuPone—brought Silverman's play to national prominence, earning critical acclaim even without Tony nominations.

What makes SLAC's production distinctive is its casting and community: it features two remarkable Utah-based actors from very different artistic backgrounds and is only the second known production to cast a Black actress in the role of Sharon. As SLAC Artistic Director **Cynthia Fleming** remarked on opening night—standing beside director **Teresa Sanderson**—between the four women onstage and off, there are more than two centuries of collective theatre experience. It's a lineage of craft, mentorship, and persistence that deepens this Utah premiere far beyond its 95 minutes.

photo

Photo: Left to Right (Teresa Sanderson, Annette Wright, Dee-Dee Darby-Duffin, and Cynthia Fleming)

Reinvention, Invisibility, and the Perils of Freedom

Silverman's *The Roommate* is a darkly comic two-hander about the hunger for transformation at midlife and the risks that come with it. Since its 2015 debut, the play has evolved as much as its protagonist, Sharon, a fifty-something divorcee from Iowa who advertises for a roommate and finds her life disrupted, expanded, and unsettled.

From the moment Robyn, a queer, world-weary transplant from the Bronx, enters Sharon's quiet kitchen with an avalanche of CSA vegetables and boxes, the play sets up a collision between two different lives. Sharon is eager to please, nervously over-talking: "I'm a big cook; I love to cook. You said you cooked?" Robyn answers with understated detachment. That first scene crystallizes the play's tension: Sharon's yearning for connection and reinvention against Robyn's guarded refusal to be fully known.

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Photo: Annette Wright and Dee-Dee Darby-Duffin and in *The Roommate* at Salt Lake Acting Company.

Midlife Crisis as Comic Tragedy

The Roommate frames Sharon's upheaval as a midlife crisis but not the glossy kind often seen in pop culture. Instead of yoga retreats or sports cars, Sharon dismantles her old self in messy, awkward, and sometimes criminal ways. What begins as a domestic dramedy gradually slips into something uncanny. Sharon doesn't merely rediscover her vitality; she pushes past it, taking risks that blur the line between freedom and self-destruction.

This version of crisis is both comic and tragic. We laugh at Sharon's mispronunciations, her thrill at smoking, her clumsy imitation of Robyn's cool. Yet beneath the humor lies a howl against invisibility—a refusal to accept that a woman past fifty must fade into irrelevance. Silverman's genius is her refusal to make this story tidy. Reinvention comes at a cost, and the audience is never allowed to relax into certainty.

the roommate

Photo: Annette Wright, and Dee-Dee Darby-Duffin

Photo Credit: Nick Fleming

Between Freedom and Ruin

Silverman denies the comfort of closure. Sharon's transformation crescendos into a finale that is comic, unsettling, and strangely exhilarating. What began with cigarettes and quinoa ends in riskier acts—moments that defy moral clarity. Her rhetorical question: "What becomes possible when you are not on the radar?" This captures the paradox of invisibility: erased by age and circumstance, yet newly unbound.

The Roommate refuses to decide whether Sharon's reinvention is liberation or ruin. It insists that starting over at midlife is always a gamble, where invisibility can be both prison and possibility. Silverman leaves us in that unsettled space—laughing, uneasy, and awake.

Imagination as Seduction

Silverman's most luminous writing appears when Sharon, giddy with possibility, insists:

“Everything is a Yes. I'm smarter and faster and younger than I knew I could be.”

To stave off Robyn's melancholy, she invents an imaginary world:

“We're the only two people left, in the ruins of a building — you're a pickpocket, and I'm a soldier. Or maybe I'm a pickpocket and you're a sailor.”

The game builds into a dance, scored by Sidney Bechet's *Si Tu Vois Ma Mère*. What begins playfully—Sharon's goofy improvisations, Robyn's laughter—turns tender, then charged. When Sharon crosses a line of intimacy, the air shifts: comedy yields to silence, apology, uncertainty. That beat—Should I be sorry?—encapsulates Silverman's refusal of easy answers. Desire here is both liberating and destabilizing; the kitchen becomes a stage for both fantasy and fracture.

The Silence of Absence

What follows is not triumph, but the ache of loss. Silverman lingers on the emptiness that follows Robyn's departure, tracing Sharon's awkward voicemails and desperate attempts at contact. It's painful, comic, and raw all at once.

One of the play's most piercing monologues arrives here:

“I'm standing in my kitchen — I don't have the right words, anymore. Wife is no longer right. Mother has not been right. — Roommate was good.”

Here, Sharon's crisis becomes linguistic as well as existential. Identity is mediated through words, and when words fail, so does the coherence of the self. For Sharon, “roommate” becomes the last word that still fits—an identity tethered to Robyn, fragile and impermanent. It's a devastating articulation of what it means to reinvent oneself when the available language has worn thin.

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Photo: Annette Wright and Dee-Dee Darby-Duffin and in *The Roommate* at Salt Lake Acting Company.

Production Elements

The intimacy of SLAC's space suits *The Roommate*, a 95-minute one-act that unfolds entirely in a kitchen. Director **Teresa Sanderson** balances humor and heartbreak with precision, shaping the play into a study of reinvention that is both tender and unsettling.

The set by **Spencer Potter** is exceptional—a fully realized Iowa kitchen that feels at once ordinary and uncanny. Its realism anchors the story, even as subtle distortions hint at the transformation simmering beneath the surface. **Jessica Graham**'s props blur the line between comfort and clutter and **Jesse Portillo**'s lighting isolates the women in moments of revelation, tracing those shifts with quiet brilliance. Moving from bright, domestic warmth to shadows of uncertainty as the play deepens.

Elizabeth Webb's costumes gently mark the women's diverging worlds, using texture and tone to signal independence, control, and unraveling. **Cynthia L. Kehr Rees**'s sound design layers the play's emotional temperature with a delightful blend of contemporary songs that evoke the rhythm of a television series, underscoring each transition with irony and wit.

Behind the scenes, **Tahra Veasley** and **Bridgette Lehman** deliver crisp, invisible precision in stage management, keeping the production's tempo seamless and alive. Together, the creative team transforms SLAC's intimate space into a site of possibility—where comedy and quiet devastation share the same kitchen table.

Actor Highlights

Dee-Dee Darby-Duffin delivers a richly layered performance as Sharon, balancing warmth, humor, and volatility. Her Sharon is eager, talkative, and endearingly awkward, but underneath the comedy she reveals sharp edges of loneliness and a desperate hunger for reinvention. Whether fumbling through a cigarette, mispronouncing quinoa, or pouring out an aching late-night voicemail, Darby-Duffin makes Sharon's midlife unraveling both comic and heartbreaking. For audiences familiar with her Salt Lake performances, this role reveals a new range—one that is deeply impressive.

Annette Wright gives Robyn a cool detachment, laced with weariness and wry intelligence. She's the perfect foil to Sharon—part mentor, part enigma, part unwilling muse. Wright resists cliché; her Robyn is not just a "bad influence," but a woman who carries her own scars and silences. The restraint in her performance makes the moments of laughter, tenderness, or exasperation with Sharon all the more striking. Together, Darby-Duffin and Wright create a volatile intimacy that powers the play. Their exchanges move fluidly between banter and confession, tenderness and retreat, comedy and devastation. The kitchen becomes not just a domestic space, but an arena for reinvention, and their performances ensure the tension never lets up.

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Photo: Annette Wright and Dee-Dee Darby-Duffin and in *The Roommate* at Salt Lake Acting Company.

Casting and Representation

It's worth noting that Salt Lake Acting Company's production marks a quiet but meaningful milestone in *The Roommate*'s performance history. Since its 2015 debut at the Humana Festival, the play has seen a range of interpretations—but only a few have featured actors who are not white in this two-hander. The 2017 **Williamstown Theatre Festival** in *Williamstown, Massachusetts*, directed by **Maggie Burrows**, featured **S. Epatha Merkerson** as Sharon—the first Black actress known to play the role—opposite **Jane Kaczmarek** as Robyn. A year later, the 2018 **Steppenwolf Theatre Company** production in *Chicago*, directed by **Phylicia Rashad**, paired **Sandra Marquez** and **Ora**

Jones, broadening the play’s imaginative and cultural frame in compelling ways.

SLAC’s **Utah premiere** continues that lineage in a region where such representation remains rare. **Dee-Dee Darby-Duffin**, a celebrated performer in Salt Lake City’s theatre and jazz scenes, becomes only the second Black actress nationally—and the first in Utah—to portray Sharon. That this evolution arrives here, in a state not typically associated with inclusive casting, is both surprising and significant. Darby-Duffin’s Sharon reframes Silverman’s story of invisibility and reinvention through an intersectional lens—where race, age, and gender converge. Her achievement is as much about performance as it is about presence: a richly layered embodiment of what it means to insist on being seen.

Final Thoughts

With *The Roommate*, Salt Lake Acting Company proves that risk and revelation are more than slogans—they are the heartbeat of its stage. In an arts landscape where stories of women over fifty remain rare, this production asserts their complexity, humor, and hunger as essential to contemporary theatre. Silverman’s story of midlife reinvention resists tidy resolution, but in Sanderson’s direction—and with Darby-Duffin and Wright at its center—it becomes an engrossing portrait of possibility: comic, unsettling, and vividly alive. What began with cigarettes and quinoa ends in acts that defy moral clarity. Her question lingers—What becomes possible when you are not on the radar?—articulating the paradox of invisibility: to vanish is to be erased, but also to be free.



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SHOW INFO: **ø?? The Roommate By Jen Silverman**

Directed by Teresa Sanderson

ø?? October 1â??26, 2025

ø??• Salt Lake Acting Company â?? 168 West 500 North, Salt Lake City, UT

Utah Premiere | 95 minutes | No Intermission

ø???ï,• Tickets: [Buy Tickets here](#)

ø???ï,• Ticket Pricing: General admission **\$35â??\$45**, depending on performance date.

All prices are **inclusive of standard service fees** â?? no hidden charges at checkout.

Discounts are available for students, seniors (65+), and groups of 10 or more.

â?¿ Accessibility Considerations

SLAC is proud to provide inclusive and accessible performances for all patrons.

Open Captioned Performance

ø??? Sunday, October 19, 2025 â?? 6 PM

Audio Described Performance

ø??? Sunday, October 26, 2025 â?? 6 PM

Sensory-Friendly & ASL-Interpreted Performance

ø??? Saturday, October 25, 2025 â?? 2 PM

ø??? [Click Here for Sensory & Sensitivity Information](#)

ø??¬ Description

A coming-of-a-certain-age comedy about an unexpected, transformative friendship between two distinctly different women. Being bad never felt so good in this riveting one-act about second acts.

It’s a story about how we keep discovering who we are and what we need as we age—and how vital, powerful, and dangerous it is, in a good way, to listen to your instincts instead of the voices telling us how we should be.

Jen Silverman

Venue

Salt Lake Acting Company
168 West 500 North
Salt Lake City, UT 84103
801-363-7522

Media Features

- [Purple Rain and 41 More Plays and Musicals to See in the U.S. This Fall \(Sept. 2024\)](#)
- [Meet the Cast & Creative Team](#)

Creative Team

- Director:** Teresa Sanderson
- Set Design:** Spencer Potter
- Lighting Design:** Jesse Portillo**
- Costume Design:** Elizabeth Webb
- Props Design:** Jessica Graham
- Sound Design:** Cynthia L. Kehr Rees**
- Production Management / Stage Management:** Tahra Veasley*, Bridgette Lehman*

**Represented by United Scenic Artists Local USA 829 of the IATSE.

Cast

- Dee-Dee Darby-Duffin*** Sharon
- Annette Wright** Robyn
- Jensie Anderson** Understudy, Sharon
- Nan Weber** Understudy, Robyn

*Member of Actors Equity Association

About the Playwright

Jen Silverman (they/them) is a playwright, novelist, and screenwriter whose work spans theatre, fiction, poetry, and television. Their plays â?? including *The Roommate*, *Witch*, *Spain*, *The Moors*, *Collective Rage: A Play in 5 Betties*, and *Phoebe in Winter* â?? have been produced on Broadway and at major companies such as Steppenwolf, The Goodman, The Geffen, and Second Stage Theatre, as well as internationally across Europe, Australia, and South America.

Silverman is the author of the novel *We Play Ourselves* (a Lambda Literary Award finalist and one of *BuzzFeed*â??s Best Books of the Year), the story collection *The Island Dwellers* (a PEN/Robert W. Bingham Prize finalist), and the poetry chapbook *Bath*, with a new novel forthcoming from Random House. Their screen and television work includes *Tales of the City* (Netflix), *Tokyo Vice* (Max), and the short film *Troy*â??an OSCARÂ®-qualifying selection featured by *The New Yorker*.

A three-time MacDowell Fellow and alum of New Dramatists, Silverman has received fellowships from the NEA, the Guggenheim Foundation, and the New York Foundation for the Arts. Their work continues to explore transformation, identity, and the restless humor at the heart of human reinvention.

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